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"The Tomb of Ni-ankhkhnum and Khnumhotep" from speculation to realization

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Abstract

The tomb of the manicurists Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, Fifth Dynasty, Old Kingdom Egypt, is regarded as exceptional either in its size and architecture or most noticeably in its lively portraits of intimacy between the two owners. Egyptologists have been confused by the portraits as being unprecedented in the Egyptian tombs. They looked for clues either in iconography or texts and came by three explanations: either they are twins, or conjoined twins, or they are in a homosexual relation. The last speculation has been passed to press and since then the news of discovering homosexuality in ancient Egypt did not cease of popping up in books, journals, media and web-sites. This paper investigates the hidden symbolization. The intimate relationship shall be ascertained in view of the pictorial narrations of Predynastic Egypt. The spirituality of the scenes shall be judged by the ancient Egyptian conception of the soul. Question: Are they two or one? This question has never been raised in Egyptology and shall be answered for within the sphere of god Khnum.

1.0 Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep in Press

On 12 November 1964 Mounir Basta, the Chief Inspector of Lower Egypt, together with the chief workman, descended a ladder into the darkness of a newly cleared shaft just south of the causeway of Unas in the Necropolis of Saqqara. Holding only a kerosene lamp, they crawled on their hands and knees into a small Fifth Dynasty offering chamber (circa 2400 BC). To their excitement the walls were inscribed, but the light revealed something Basta had never seen before in any of the Saqqara tombs. There, carved in the space between two false doors, stood two men embracing one another. Their names and identical titles were carved above them: Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, manicurist of the king and the inspector of manicurists of the Palace. Basta was both impressed and intrigued:

The scene is repeated on two other walls.... The importance of the discovery of this tomb can be connected with this unique scene. The inscriptions of the tomb do not lead us to any solution, concerning the relationship between the two deceased. Were they two brothers? Were they the father and son? Or were they two officials in the king's palace who had enjoyed a cordial friendship in life and wished to keep it after death in the nether world (Basta 1979: 47). ⁽¹⁾

The description of the tomb has been fully published in 1977 by Moussa, A.M. and Altenmüller, H., under the title "Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep" that is considered the standard work of the tomb. Nothing unusual did fulminate in the sphere of Egyptology respecting the interpretation of the pictorial images rather than "joint tomb owners Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep." In January 2000; the title: "World's oldest Homosexual tomb found in Egypt" has been breaking news, the reporter wrote: Excited Archaeologists say they have discovered the remains of history's first known homosexuals, a pair of ancient Egyptian manicurists buried together in a 4,400-year-old tomb! An illustration found on a wall of the death chamber clearly depicts the royal manicurists, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, nose to nose in a steamy embrace. What's more, the buddy-buddy pair was laid to rest with all the trappings that usually accompanied the burials of married couples, says Egyptologist Greg Reeder of the American Research Center in Egypt. In other tomb paintings that depict the lives of the deceased, Khnumhotep occupies the place where Niankhkhnum's wife would traditionally stand. And accompanying hieroglyphics state that the longtime companions were "joined in life and joined in death." Reeder says the evidence is overwhelming that the men were gay – making this the earliest sign ever found of same-sex activity. And the discovery should be taken seriously, the scientist says, although he admits, "People laugh when you say manicurists." The Egyptian tomb was first unearthed 34 years ago and experts were initially baffled when they could find the slightly built male mummies entombed practically cheek-to-cheek. But now, after painstaking examination of the contents of the tomb, Reeder and other Egyptologists have concluded that the pair was in fact light in their sandals. The ancient Egyptians were open-minded about gays, the discovery of the tomb suggests, because only individuals who were held in extremely high esteem got to have such monuments built in their honor after death. "Tombs were horrifically expensive," one expert points out. The manicurists were apparently much more than mere fingernail clippers, says Reeder, who presented his findings at a recent gathering of Egyptologists at Southern Methodist University. The pair was also referred to in the hieroglyphics as "royal confidants,"

meaning they were on hand to lend a sympathetic ear to the Pharaoh's problems, exchange gossip, and even offer helpful hints on decorating the royal dwellings. In making the gay couple royal confidants, the Pharaoh proved he wasn't homophobic – because it meant they were among only a handful of people who were allowed to touch him! ⁽²⁾ The insinuations and innuendo of the reporter should not escape our attention as being reflections of Reeder's oblique thoughts.

Five years later and on December 2005, NYTimes published a professional report on the same tomb under the title "A Mystery, Locked in Timeless Embrace", written by John Noble Wilford and cited here in full.

When Egyptologists entered the tomb for the first time more than four decades ago, they expected to be surprised. Explorers of newly exposed tombs always expect that, and this time they were not disappointed they were confounded. It was back in 1964, outside Cairo, near the famous Step Pyramid in the necropolis of Saqqara and a short drive from the Sphinx and the breathtaking pyramids at Giza. The newfound tomb yielded no royal mummies or dazzling jewels. But the explorers stopped in their tracks when the light of their kerosene lamp shined on the wall art in the most sacred chamber. There, carved in stone, were the images of two men embracing. Their names were inscribed above: Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep. Though not of the nobility, they were highly esteemed in the palace as the chief manicurists of the king, sometime from 2380 to 2320 B.C., in the time known as the fifth dynasty of the Old Kingdom. Grooming the king was an honored occupation. Archaeologists were taken aback. It was extremely rare in ancient Egypt for an elite tomb to be shared by two men of apparently equal standing. The usual practice was for such mortuary temples to be the resting place of one prominent man, his wife and children. And it was most unusual for a couple of the same sex to be depicted locked in an embrace. In other scenes, they are also shown holding hands and nose kissing, the favored form of kissing in ancient Egypt. What were scholars to make of their intimate relationship? Over the years, the tomb's wall art has been subjected to learned analysis, inspiring considerable speculation. One interpretation is that the two men are brothers, probably identical twins, and this may be the earliest known depiction of twins. Another is that the men had a homosexual relationship, a more recent view that has gained support among gay advocates. Now, an Egyptologist at New York University has stepped into the debate with a third interpretation. He has marshaled circumstantial evidence that the two men may have been conjoined twins, popularly known as Siamese twins. The expert, David O'Connor, a professor of ancient Egyptian art at the N.Y.U. Institute of Fine Arts, said: "My suggestion is that Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep were indeed twins, but of a very special sort. They were conjoined twins, and it was this physical peculiarity that prompted the many depictions of them handholding or embracing in their tomb chapel."

Dr. O'Connor elaborated on his hypothesis in a recent lecture and in an interview in New York. He is describing and defending the idea before scholarly peers at a conference, "Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt," this week at the University of Wales in Swansea. Opposition to his proposal promises to be spirited. Most Egyptologists accept the normal twin's interpretation advanced most prominently by John Baines, an archaeologist at the University of Oxford in England. "It's a very persuasive case Baines makes," Dr. O'Connor acknowledged. And he noted that the gay couple hypothesis had become the popular idea in

the last decade. A leading proponent is Greg Reeder, an independent scholar in San Francisco and a contributing editor of KMT, a magazine of Egyptian art and history. The most Google references to the tomb, archaeologists say, concern the homosexual idea. The gay argument leans on the analogy with depictions of married heterosexual couples in Egyptian art, which was first suggested by Nadine Cherpion, a French archaeologist. Because the embraces of heterosexual couples in the tomb art convey an implicit erotic and sexual relationship, and perhaps the belief of its continuation in the afterlife, Mr. Reeder and his allies contend that similar scenes involving the two men have the same significance, that they presumably are gay partners. Calling attention to the most intimate scene of the two embracing men, Mr. Reeder said: "They are so close together here that not only are they face to face and nose to nose, but so close that the knots on their belts are touching, linking their lower torsos. If this scene were composed of a Male female couple instead of the same sex couple we have here, there would be little question concerning what it is we are seeing." In an interview last week, Mr. Reeder said Dr. O'Connor's new interpretation was fascinating, but added, "It's the most extreme and unnecessary theory."

Dr. Baines, in an email message from Oxford, said that he "would stick with my own interpretation, because it seems to me to require the smallest amount of 'exceptionalism' and to fit reasonably well with other patterns." As for the sexual implications of the embracing poses, Dr. Baines has suggested that they could signify the "socially and emotionally linked roles" of two men who probably were twins. Or they could symbolize "protection or close identification and reciprocity" between the two. Ancient Egyptian art, experts say, is not meant always to be taken literally. James Allen, an Egyptologist at the Metropolitan Museum of Art who is not involved in the research, called the twins hypothesis probable and the Conjoined twins' idea "an interesting wrinkle." The least likely, he said, was the homosexual relationship proposal. Dr. Baines said, "The gay couple idea is essentially derived from imposing modern preoccupations on ancient materials and not attending to the cultural context."

If Dr. O'Connor is correct, the tomb holds a rare example of documented conjoined twins that early in history, he said, and thus an insight into ancient Egyptian attitudes toward disabilities. He cited other records, and art of the dwarf Seneb, who in a somewhat later court was "overseer of dwarfs in charge of dressing" the king and a tutor of the royal sons, both positions of elite status. Egyptians appear to have viewed such people as auspicious figures, not freaks. "The creator gods had made everything, dwarfs, two-headed calves and conjoined twins," Dr. O'Connor said. "A king felt more elevated for having these singular creatures to serve him as manicurists." Like most elite tombs, this one was built of stone masonry and had several chambers, the most sacred the chapel or cult room. Here, survivors of the deceased brought offerings and paid homage. Beneath the room was the burial chamber. The remains of the two men were not found.

Egyptian tombs typically represent the lives of the departed in art and script. Images of the two men and hieroglyphic inscriptions about them and their families are everywhere, in corridors and in the chapel. The two men had wives who are named and represented in the art. Yet there are no scenes of them embracing their wives. Their apparently close relationship and equal standing are illustrated not only in images of them together, either holding hands or

embracing. In other instances, Dr. O'Connor said, one man appears alone on a wall face, and the other on the opposing wall. Their stature and pose are identical, and they are performing similar acts. While one fishes in the marshes, for example, the other hunts birds in the same setting. These scenes and the ones of intimate embraces led to the speculation, initially by Mounir Basta, the Egyptian archaeologist who first explored the tomb, that Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep were brothers, probably twins. Dr. Baines developed the idea in a seminal study in the 1980's, and others took up the gay couple idea. When Dr. O'Connor looked into the matter, he was struck by a comparison of the images of the two men with pictures of Chang and Eng, the famous conjoined twins born in 1811 in Siam. They were seen close together, arm in arm. They and a number of documented conjoined twins also had wives and children and engaged in strenuous activities, much like the hunting and fishing of the two Egyptians.

Their names, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep suggest another clue, Dr. O'Connor said. Both names refer to the god Khnum, the deity who fashions the form of a child in the womb. Though not an uncommon part of Egyptian names, in this case it might be a play on words to signify their paired lives. David Silverman, an Egyptologist at the University of Pennsylvania, and his student Joshua Robinson pointed out to Dr. O'Connor that the name Khnum was also similar to the ancient Egyptian word *khenem*, which means "to unite" or "be united." One problem, however, is that none of the tomb art shows a physical link between the two men, as in some pictures of Chang and Eng. Egyptian mortuary art, Dr. O'Connor said, "operates in terms of idealized types, not actual figures." "It's not photographic art," he added. Dr. Allen of the Metropolitan Museum agreed, saying, "Egyptian art was symbolic, and it is doubtful the Egyptians would have tried to represent realistically the join between these twins." Whether the two men were normal twins, conjoined twins or a gay couple, the speculation highlights a problem and an opportunity for scholars.

"We don't have a lot of information about how twins were viewed in ancient Egypt or how gay life was perceived," Dr. Allen said. Few accounts refer to twins of any kind in the civilization, and an honored role for conjoined twins, if that is what they were, would be even stronger evidence of Egyptian attitudes toward people with physical disabilities. "Such attributes were often seen as fabulous rather than monstrous, and positive rather than negative," Dr. O'Connor said, "They attested the creator god's ability, if he wished, to bring wondrous changes upon the norms he himself had established." Besides, Dr. O'Connor pointed out, "The fact that they could have worked simultaneously on the grooming of the king's two hands might have been seen as especially appropriate and desirable." Homosexuality was only occasionally referred to in Egyptian documents, sometimes in myths of certain gods implying that it was not considered a normal relationship. The prevailing attitude, scholars say, was not antigay, though probably negative, and certainly not as accepting of homosexual activity it was in classical Greece. If the tomb of the two men was indeed a public profession of their emotional and sexual attachment, scholars say, it could inspire a reassessment of the place of homosexuals in Egyptian culture. Defending his interpretation, Mr. Reeder said the similarity of the embracing scenes with those of husbands and wives should not be dismissed. He further noted, in his lecture in Wales, new evidence that he said suggested that one of the men died well before the other. Khnumhotep was described in one place as being honored by a great god, possibly meaning he had by then

entered the afterlife, while in a corresponding scene Niankhkhnum had only official titles of his career in life. If, then, Niankhkhnum was the one who finished decorating the tomb, Mr. Reeder said, it was unlikely that they were conjoined twins. "They would have had to be surgically separated," he said in an interview. "The Egyptians had surgical knowledge. But separating such twins would be expecting too much." The fact that the two men had families is not seen as contradicting the gay hypothesis, Egyptologists said. Like others of the time, the two men would presumably have sired children to carry on after them and maintain the cult dedicated to their wellbeing through eternity. Mr. Reeder said his hypothesis "resonates in the gay community because it shows two historical men being intimate with each other, and this was something that could be shown in an ancient culture."

Dr. O'Connor acknowledged the interpretation's appeal. "Gays and lesbians still experience a great deal of prejudice and discrimination, and these two ancient Egyptians are yet further proof that homosexuality goes far back in history," he said. "The semipublic nature of their tomb chapel," he added, "suggests their gay relationship was accepted as normative by the elite of a particularly famous and illustrious civilization." Finally, Dr. O'Connor conceded that the conjoined twins hypothesis, like the other two, is not "fully supported by conclusive evidence."⁽³⁾

2.0 Scholarship Writings

Reeder, by the eye of sexologist, writes: Though the foundation of Baines's twin theory may now be called into question, the intimate poses and gestures of the two manicurists in the iconographic displays within their tomb still require attention. Are the two manicurists closer to Revez's definition of metaphorical 'brothers', perhaps alter egos of men who are on equal footing with each other, both sharing the same values and holding the same power? They both shared the same titles of royal manicurist and overseer of the manicurists in the palace of the king. They also both received equal offerings in the tomb and are portrayed the same number of times. But there are curious subtle differences in their representations and intimate nuances that need to be addressed.⁽⁴⁾ It is Niankhkhnum who leads Khnumhotep by the hand into the inner spaces of their tomb. This bears a close resemblance to a husband and wife scene, where Mereruka leads his wife Wa'tetkhethor into the tomb and into their conjugal bed (Cherpion 1995:47).⁽⁵⁾ Underneath the image of Khnumhotep holding a lotus is a special musical scene. A musical director is facing three singers and two harpists. He makes a very interesting comment that is carved in front of him. He tells this group to play the one about "The Two Divine Brothers." The epithet 'snwj ntrwj' in other contexts refers to Horus and Seth and it should be considered as such here. There are strong suggestions as to what kind of song might have been sung to two intimate male friends at a banquet, a banquet that, when shared by husband and wife, could have had erotic elements coded into the scene.⁽⁶⁾ It is when the totality of intimate scenes in the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep are compared to the innovative conjugal figurations of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Dynasties of the Old Kingdom that same-sex desire and sentiment must be considered as a probable explanation. Whatever the biological relationship may have been between Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, their iconographic vocabulary was most closely aligned to that used to portray conjugal sentiment between husband and wife. Their representation was unique, and deviates from what appears to be the norm for the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Dynasties of the Old Kingdom.⁽⁷⁾

Baines, in his conscientious article said: The tomb is exceptional in many ways. It gives equal space throughout to the two men, and contains groups of them embracing and holding hands; their titles are almost identical and their names closely similar. Their kinship, if any, is never stated, which is not surprising, because Old Kingdom tombs are relatively sparing in the genealogical information they give. The point is therefore insignificant for their proposed status as twins, except in that it makes it unprovable. The symbolic attributes of staff and strip of cloth, which are usually carried by a single figure, are distributed between the two. In this composition it would not be possible to show two of each attribute, but the arrangement is in any case apt. A single status or role in the form of two individuals views the scenes. All except Khnumhotpe, whose hand is in that of Ni'ankhkhnun, have their forward hands clasped to their chests. Thus the two men appear again as a unit, their two names also being written under a single set of titles. The very large signs msf "his child(ren)" by the shoulder of each tomb-owner announce the topic, so that there is effectively an ascending and peer family scene, in which the owners play a modest role, and a descending one, which, unlike the other, contains a statement of kinship.⁽⁸⁾

As one moves towards the focal false doors, the owners cease to relate to other figures, becoming concerned instead with each other and the next generation, and then with each other only. Since the embracing and hand-holding scenes are unique in private tombs, little can be said about their meaning beyond the fact that they express publicly the close involvement of the two men. Elsewhere the motifs do not have a sexual meaning, as opposed to displaying socially and emotionally linked roles, and such a meaning should not be sought here. Embraces normally symbolize protection or close identification and reciprocity, of which the latter is relevant here. The tomb contains two compositions of fowling and fish-spearing scenes, one in the entrance portico and the other on the west wall of the main rock-cut chamber; Ni'ankhkhnun is the fowler and Khnumhotpe the fisherman. In both Khnumhotpe has two tilapia on his spear. All other such scenes from the Old Kingdom show a tilapia and a lates. In later periods these scenes have a strong symbolic content³², and in view of their prominence and elaboration in Old Kingdom tombs and the general similarity between examples of different periods, it is likely that the earlier versions have a comparable symbolism. Of the fish the tilapia, which is a widespread symbol of rebirth", is probably the more important; in private tombs the lates certainly plays less part. The best explanation of the paired tilapia is that the more dispensable of the fish is omitted in favour of a composition showing the linked aspiration of the two men in a single image. If the tilapia symbolizes the rebirth of one man, two may signify the rebirth of two. Their destinies in the next world are implicitly indissociable.⁽⁹⁾

On another level, their identical titles and function in the state would be held by one man in most cases. Their hierarchical ranking, in which Ni'ankhkhnun is placed first presumably because he is the older, does not affect their singleness. The two are the most prominent known holders of the title "supervisor/ overseer of manicurists of the palace". Instead of assuming, as Altenmüller does, that this is because of a real but transitory importance of this office, I suggest that the evident status of these men has other causes; it is scarcely likely that there was a sudden demand for manicurists in large numbers. The title indicates proximity to the king, in the same manner as hairdressing ones do, and the explanation may rather lie there. In some non-manicuring sense they were special people. The cause of their high status is probably not their social origin; although there are possible connections between them and

tombs at Giza, they do not ally them with anybody exceptional. It could be because they were twins. Twinship could elevate status in some cases, rather as happened with rare dwarfs, who were also close to the king. No single detail reviewed here is decisive, but the general effect of the tomb is of an extended analogy to the presentation of the certain twins Suty and Hor, who also appear to have enjoyed a higher status than their unknown kinsmen — but they did perform jointly an important function.⁽¹⁰⁾

Brancaglione Junior favored Reeder's thoughts and spelled unreserved thoughts (translated from Portuguese). The most discussed source on homosexuality in ancient Egypt is in a tomb dating from the V Dynasty, located at the end Southeast grounds of Djoser pyramid, the Necropolis of Saqqara. This tomb was made for two men and their families, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, and both had the title of Supervisor of Manicures of the Palace. The great originality of this tomb is the fact that these men are represented in poses that conventionally are unique to couples. In Egyptian art, conjugal feeling is expressed by hugs and position of hand and body practiced by the woman with her husband. Both have wives and children, who are represented in the tomb on a smaller scale and secondary positions. Affective gestures are made among men. Niankhkhnum occupies the male role, while Khnumhotep, the female, hugging or being led by the hand by Niankhkhnum. In the scenes in the central pillar of the anteroom and room offerings, the faces are so close that the tips of noses reach touching. All experts admit the originality of such intimacy expressed by these men, a monument whose function, among others, was to perpetuate their relationship for all eternity. The question is whether this feeling can be considered the expression of a homosexual relationship (Reeder, 2000), or other form of affection that united these men. The evidence on the male homoeroticism in ancient Egypt is few and, in some cases, difficult to interpret; as lesbianism, they are practically nonexistent.⁽¹¹⁾

Mazzone, reconstructing the chance encounter of both men wrote: Westendorf, but also Reeder in a more recent series of articles (2000; 2008), has already proposed an original interpretation: we are facing here a case (rare) of homosexual relationship in ancient Egypt. In this respect, as a homosexual icon, the tomb is acquiring fame as a popular destination for gay tourists in Egypt (Holland 2006). The idea to which Reeder refers in his papers has obtained the exposure needed to challenge the more 'conservative' brothers/twins interpretation (Baines 1985; Parkinson 1995). Were these intimate individuals, 'superintendents of the royal manicurists' at the court of the king *Nj-Wsr-Ré* (Old Kingdom, c. 2494-2345 BC), engaged in a homosexual relationship? To what extent is this suggestion convincing? Without traces of human remains or biological information, archaeologists have not been able to establish a convincing explanation of the kind of connection that might have existed between the two individuals. Certainly, the depiction of the spouses and children of both men within the scenes suggests that we are looking at the lives of men who died in mature age, probably after having enjoyed an ordinary middle-class family life. The key to their potential fraternal union could be in the ancient word *sn*, a term that appears in the scenes and is generally used to denote 'brotherhood' or 'friendship'; however, the meaning is still subject to divergent interpretations. While scholars search for a definitive clarification of this term, Reeder's approach suggests the possibility of other types of relationships in ancient Egyptian society, thus positing the existence of potential non-heterosexual relationships in the conventional

patriarchal social system. Of course, every idea has equal chance at convincing the audience; many scholars have argued that sexuality in the past is often a complicated subject of investigation.⁽¹²⁾

Indeed, the epithet *sn.wy ntr.wy*, the ‘two divine brothers’, in the same scene around the banquet is, according to Reeder, nothing other than a reference to the Contending of Horus and Seth and the attempted sexual penetration narrated in the popular account of the Chester Beatty Papyrus I (c. 1160 BC). Reeder uses the book by Cherpion, *Sentiment conjugal et figuration à l'Ancien Empire* (1995), to support his homoerotic interpretation (Reeder 2008, 145). Reeder argues that this potentially homosexual couple had requested for their tomb to have the same aesthetic representation of ‘intimate relationship’ as that depicted on the tombs of heterosexual partners. Finally, at least within their last resting place, the two manicurists seem to have obtained some kind of acceptance of their homosexuality. But this sort of sexual honesty depicted in a tomb would not be easily justifiable before the gods at the tribunal of the weighing of the heart. Reeder perhaps does not consider that, amongst the forty-two morals in the magic prayers of the Spell of coming forth by day, there is the strict prohibition of homosexual acts (Parkinson 1995, 61-2).⁽¹³⁾

Indeed, there is the feeling that the tomb under discussion was initially designed for the first superintendent of manicurists, Nj-Ankh-Khnum, and his wife, Kntj-Kws, following the more traditional funerary institution at Saqqara, and in respect of the order of *ma'at* (the principle of justice, order and truth). This is evident in the scene of the banquet where the couple was originally united. The tomb was ‘usurped’, in a later phase, by Khnum-Hotep. When Nj-Ankh-Khnum died, the tomb was probably still under construction and the building project was only at the preliminary stage. The second inspector of manicurists and the new occupant of the tomb, Khnum-Hotep, in a sort of *amore platonico*, wanted to be the ‘sentimental substitute’ of Kntj-Kws by imposing his own name and image close to that of Nj-Ankh-Khnum in the tomb. One last consideration: as pointed out by Vasiljević (2008, 369), the indubitable coincidence of careers, title progressions and duties seems to suggest a correlation of timeline between the two men, which implies, most likely, a consanguineous rather than a sexual connection.⁽¹⁴⁾

Vasiljević has been first to raise the notion of the *Ka*, as conceptualized in Egyptology, and suggested that Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, especially if they were identical twins, could remind their contemporaries of man's double, *ka*, or may have even been seen as each other's *ka*, and a representation of the embracing brothers would have been an appropriate way to allude to this notion. The *ka* has an immanent quality of continuity and demonstrates itself especially at the moments of birth and death. That aspect probably influenced the placement of the representation of the embrace at the entrance to the offering room and in the room itself, i.e. in the liminal zone of the tomb. The choice is not unique - the majority of the representations of embrace are also placed immediately next to the false door or on the false door itself," and thus clearly show that the embrace has to do with the hereafter.⁽¹⁵⁾ An allusion to a similarity to Seth and Horus may have been impertinent of private men in the time of the Old Kingdom, no matter how much their status was an elevated one. On the other hand at that time the *ka* is already a component of the utmost importance for the Afterlife of a human being, and the cult was performed for the *ka*. As a fact of such importance, the duality of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, i.e. their being each other's *ka*, was emphasized. It was

achieved by means of iconography, especially by mutual face to face embrace. The basic iconography of face to face embrace, however, scarce, was already at hand in the private sphere at the time of the Old Kingdom and not only its pattern, but also its meaning was akin to the later attested representations of giving/sharing a breath, between gods and kings. Moreover, the mutual, face to face embrace was not represented once, but thrice, in the liminal zone of the tomb, and the key points of circulation in the area were chosen for the representations: a) on the threshold of the zone, to be seen before entering the offering room; b) between the false doors, the focal point of the cult inside the room, marking the very borderline between the worlds of the living and the dead, and finally c) between the two doors on the east wall of the offering room, at the exit point from the liminal zone, to be seen while stepping out of the zone. If the word *sn* had been used for Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, most of its different basic or metaphorical meanings – like brother, colleague, alter ego, persons of equal status, and relationship of complementarity would correspond well with the way they represented themselves. Especially if they were, as it probably was the case, identical twins, i.e. doubles of each other, and thus indispensable for each other in the Afterlife. ⁽¹⁶⁾

3.0 Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep: are they two or one?

Egyptologists, who advanced the ancient Egyptian religion, failed in gleaning the heart of the Egyptian literature and the funeral iconography. The Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, the Book of the Dead and the iconography of tombs and coffins have been addressing the Living Soul of the dead, not the corpse or the mummy. Scholars -persuaded by the presumption that the dead, physically he as if a living corpse, is the subject sermonized in the Egyptian funerary texts and iconography- have emboldened fanciful conceptions. The essence of the soul manifested by the Ka or the Ba or the Akh and the 'twin characteristics of the soul' has been first revealed in my research of 2014/2015. By reason, we must have faith in seeing Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep as souls acting within the profoundness of the Egyptian conception of the soul. The twins, explicitly, announced their spiritual character as inscribed in the tomb on the passage leading to the courtyard:

South Wall: overseer of the manicurists of the palace, confidant of the king, honoured by the king, the one honoured by the great god, Niankhkhnum 'Journey to the beautiful West'.

North Wall: Overseer of the manicurists of the palace, confidant of the king, honoured by the king, the one honoured by the great god, Khnumhotep 'Journey to the beautiful West'. ⁽¹⁷⁾

It is the 'Journey to the beautiful West' that leads the righteous souls to their abode: "the beautiful west". The question: "are they two or one," never occurred to the minds of Egyptologists for a simple reason that is: the gross ignorance in "*Temple Egyptology*" of the essence of the ka-soul. Hereinafter the question shall be answered.

4.0 Predynastic Egypt

As a matter of fact, the ambiguity of pictorial narration in the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep can only be resolved by looking further back at the palettes of Predynastic Egypt. The palettes are books of revelation inscribed on stone. The generic context is the

essence of the *Soul* and each palette represents a diacritical chapter. Dynastic writings are of no wield in contemplating the context of the palettes and by contrast it is in vain to veraciously interpret the dynastic iconography and writings secluded from the pictorial narrations of Predynastic artefacts.⁽¹⁸⁾ It is important for the reader to notice that I always discuss the iconography as if looking to us, so our right is their left. It is the methodology of the ancient Egyptians in communicating their thoughts where marking "right and left" is crucial in their conception of the soul. We had to obey such methodology for us to penetrate the Egyptian thoughts. The major palettes of Predynastic Egypt have been exhaustively investigated and re-discovered in my research of 2014/2015 and here, I am selecting what is most appropriate for the context of this investigation.

4.1 The Louvre Palette: the origin and essence of the soul



Fig. 1 Louvre Palette Obverse



Fig. 2 Louvre Palette Reverse

It was the Egyptian era of divine revelation. In the Louvre palette, the Egyptian hierophant has been writing on stone the second chapter of the *Genuine Book of Genesis of man*; that is the *Origin of the Soul*. On the obverse (fig. 1), the *Palm Tree* symbolizes the *Tree of Life* or the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil* of the Old Testament. The Louvre Palette is also known by the "four-dog palette." The artist never meant four dogs rather; he prefigured only two dogs symbolizing the goodness and evilness characterization of the soul. The divine

nature of the soul makes the twin characteristics in a constant state of conflict. In order to communicate such state, he ingeniously mirrored the two dogs on both the obverse and the reverse of the palette. The two giraffes symbolize the innocence of the twin-natured soul at the source: the *Tree of Life*. The hierophant decided upon the peaceful, herbivore, and beauteous animal to correspond the state of harmony and peacefulness; hence the absence of conflict between the twin-forces of the soul at the origin. The two giraffes occupied the full space between the primary and the mirroring, signifying the *Edenic Essence* of the Soul, antecedent of her infusion in humans.

On the upper segment of the reverse (fig. 2), we notice the two primary female dogs, the one at right represents goodness and the other at left represents evilness. From the goodness right side, a lion cub is heading towards the left side, in a non-offensive act. On the lower mirrored section a serpopard cub, rushing from the evilness left side in the direction of the right and -by natural instincts- confronting, head-to-head, the goodness dog. The lion and the serpopard cubs, seen in motion, symbolize the breed of goodness and evilness as being the two antagonistic forces. While the obverse represents the origin of the soul, the reverse represents the infusion, the indwelling and the activation of the soul within the just-born-child. We are witnessing the soul and her twin antagonistic forces in their early state of infancy and immaturity.⁽¹⁹⁾

4.2 The Hunters Palette: Conjoined Twins

The Hunters palette (Fig. 3) should be titled "*The Combat Within*". We are encountering the everlasting conflict between goodness and evilness that is running within; the factual Armageddon. Goggling at the top of the palette, we discern "conjoined-bull twins." The artist, in order to communicate the teachings of the divine law of the twin characteristics of the soul, envisioned the "conjoined-bull twins," where no surgeon can ever separate. The palette detail (Fig. 4) validates the term conjoined twins.⁽²⁰⁾

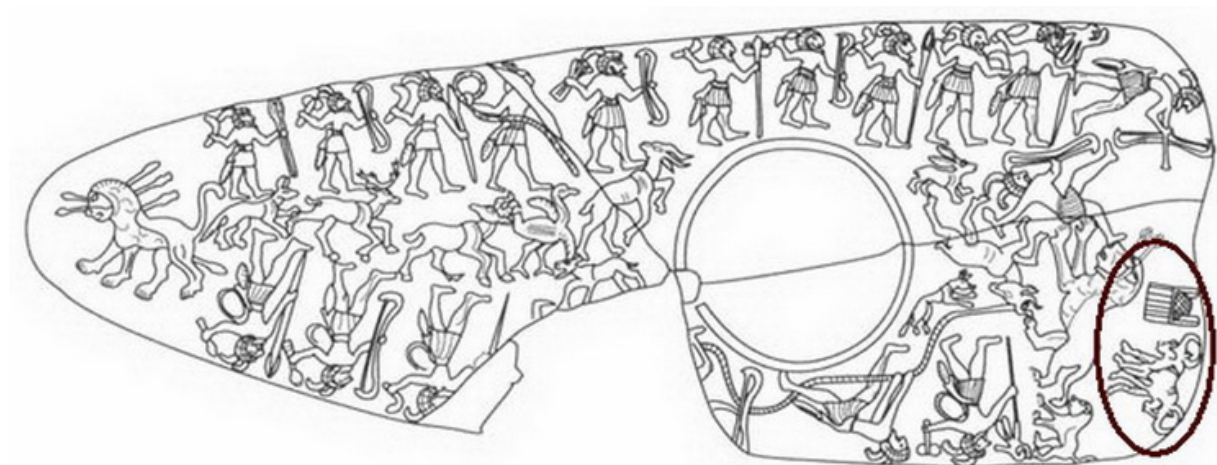


Fig. 3 Hunters Palette
after Whitney Davis "masking the Blow, 1992"

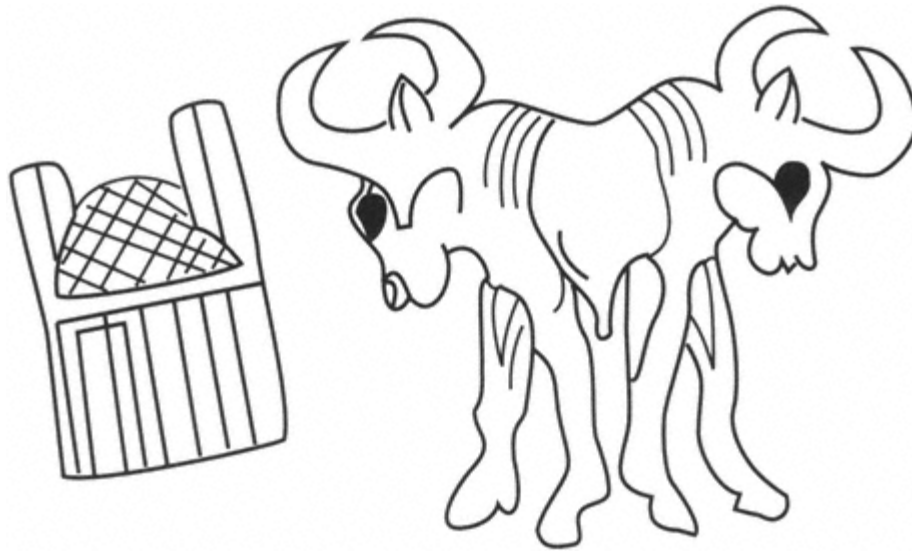


Fig. 4 Hunters Palette Detail
after Whitney Davis "masking the Blow, 1992"

4.3 The Oxford Palette: Intimate Spirituality

Counter to Hunters palette, the title of Oxford palette is "*Pacification*". On the obverse (fig. 5): we have in sight two serpopards representing the twin characteristics of the soul in the action of licking, concurrently, the back of a gazelle. On the reverse (fig. 6) a lion and a gazelle are depicted in two scenes. The lion and the gazelle are in the posture of face-to-face, eye-to-eye, and nose-to-nose in an instant of intimate kissing. It is the spirituality at climax and the intellectuality at edge for the ancient Egyptian to silently convey the divine message of reconciliation, pacification, and harmonization of the twin antagonistic forces.⁽²¹⁾

Davis, puzzled by the unfamiliar scenes, wrote: "Within the area of the image surmounted by the wild dogs and below the ostrich, two serpopards are shown licking the back of a stumbling gazelle. The motif is often interpreted as depicting a nonviolent if incipiently aggressive action; its specific designation and connotations are not known. A related passage appears in the same position on the reverse side of the palette: two rampant lions are depicted as biting two gazelles belonging to the same species (with short up-curved horns and short tail) as the gazelle on the obverse. As replications of the carnivores-and-prey formula, these particular obverse and reverse motifs are unusual; more standard versions of the formula appear in lower portions of the image on both sides. Rather than chasing their prey, the carnivores in the top passages approach frontally; and the action in both cases is ambiguous—on the obverse "licking" rather than attacking, and on the reverse "biting" in a fashion that almost resembles kissing. The face-to-face encounters involving serpopards and lions with gazelles—seemingly free of conflict—must be metaphorical rather than literal. The wild dogs facing one another and clasping paws, surmounting the whole and framing the top two-thirds of the image on both sides of the palette, thus provide a symbolic announcement of this theme."⁽²²⁾

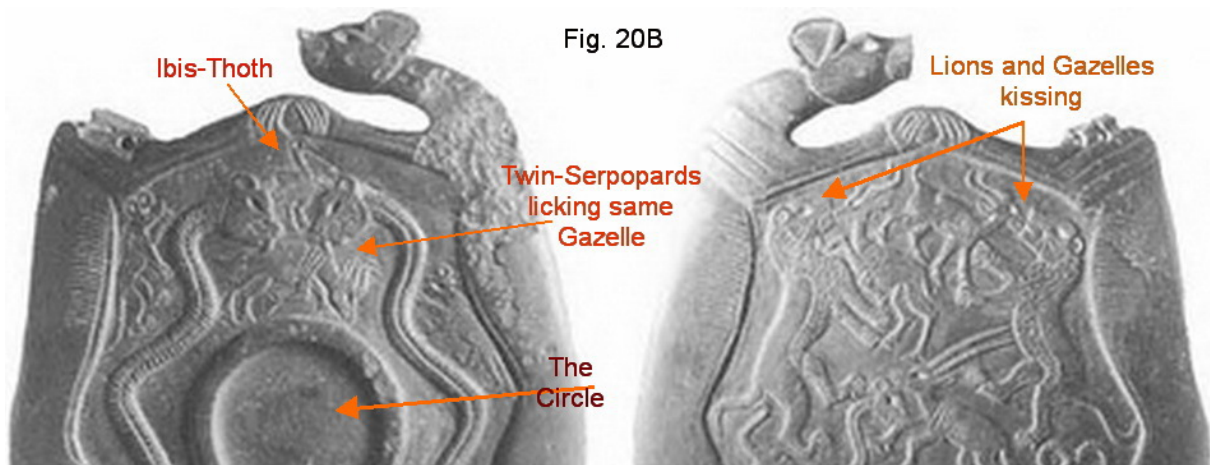


Fig. 5 Oxford Palette Obverse Detail

Fig. 6 Oxford Palette Reverse Detail

5.0 Khnum: fashioner of Men and their Ka

From the legend of "The coming of the great queen-Hatshepsut", we read: Then Amon-Ra returned and was enthroned among the Gods. And he summoned to his presence Khnum the creator, he who fashions the bodies of men, who dwells beside the rushing waters of the cataract. To Khnum he gave command saying, "Khnum, fashioner of the bodies of men, fashion for me my daughter, she who shall be the great Queen of Egypt. For I will give to her all life and satisfaction, all stability and all joy of heart forever." Khnum the creator, the fashioner of the bodies of men, the dweller by the cataract, made answer to Amon-Ra, "I will form for thee thy daughter, and her form shall be more glorious than the Gods, for the greatness of her dignity as King of the South and North." Then he brought his potter's wheel, and took clay, and with his hands he fashioned the body of the daughter of queen Aahmes and the body of her ka. And the body of the child and the body of the ka were alike in their limbs and their faces, and none but the Gods could know them apart. Beautiful were they with the beauty of Amon-Ra, more glorious were they than the Gods. ⁽²³⁾ The pictures in the temple of Luxor which represents the birth of Amenophis III are well known. The infant prince in each of these pictures is accompanied by his ka, his exact image. The ka is nursed and suckled by the same goddesses. The analogy between "The coming of the great queen-Hatshepsut" and "The Louvre Palette" of Predynastic Egypt is astounding. Both narrate the infusion of the soul into the just-born-child. Interestingly enough, the legend employed the term Ka and not the term Ba; and right here is the analogy. The Ka of the child is the manifestation of the soul in her early state of infancy and immaturity. The twin antagonistic forces of the soul are entertaining innocence and peace.

5.1 Khnum: infusing the Ka

From the coffin of Masaharta, Dynasty 21st, we recognize the Egyptian boy flanked by two Khnum-gods or literally mirrored Khnum. The double Khnum are outspreading their arms in the posture of bestowing or precisely infusing the Ka-soul for her indwelling in her seat, which is the chest of man; betokened by the circle. The circle has been the nucleus icon of the slate palettes of Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt. ⁽²⁴⁾ The artist resolutely configured the double Khnum, one at each side of Masaharta, to emphasize the twin nature of the Ka-soul.(fig. 7)



Fig. 7 Coffin of Masaharta outer
Egyptian Museum CG61027

5.2 The Appellation Khnum

The Egyptians have given the soul the appellation "Khnum".

Chapter 30B Book of the Dead:

Formula for not letting the heart of N opposes him in the necropolis. He shall say:

O my heart of my mother,

O my heart of my being!

Do not rise up against me as witness,

Do not oppose me in the tribunal,

Do not repel against me before the guardian of the scales!

You are my ka within my body,

The Khnum who prospers my limbs.

Go to the good place prepared for us,

Do not make my name stink before them,

The magistrates who put people in their places!

If it is good for us it's good for the judge,

It pleases him who renders judgment.
Do not invent lies before the god,
Before the great god, the lord of the west,
Lo, your uprightness brings vindication! ⁽²⁵⁾

The phrase "You are my ka within my body, the Khnum who prospers my limbs," is the explicit designation of the ka-soul as Khnum.

Kubban Stela: Ramses II

Heaven is given to thee and that which is in it, earth is led to thee and that which is in it; the pool comes to thee bearing its fowl. Harsekha bears her provisions, the best of the ka of Re; Thoth has set them on thy every side, that thou mayest open thy mouth, to enrich whom thou pleases, according as thou art the living Khnum, and thy dominion is in victory and might like Re when he ruled the Two Lands, O King Ramses II, given life." ⁽²⁶⁾ Herein; the living soul is identified by the living Khnum.

Thoth: Discerner of Souls

Address to the gods of the underworld. From the Papyrus of Nu.

I will not make mention of thee,
saith the guardian of the door of this Hall of double Maati,
unless thou tellest me my name.

Discerner of hearts and searcher of the reins, is thy name.

Now will I make mention of thee to the god.

But who is the god that dwelleth in his hour? Speak thou it.

Maau-Taui (i.e., he who keepeth the record of the two lands) is his name.

'Who then is Maau-Taui?

He is Thoth.

Come, saith Thoth. But why hast thou come?

I have come, and I press forward that I may be mentioned.

What now is thy condition?

I, even I, am purified from evil things,
and I am protected from the baleful deeds,
of those who live in their days; and I am not among them. ⁽²⁷⁾

The appellation "Discerner of hearts and searcher of the reins" of Thoth in Papyrus of Nu, Eighteenth Dynasty, is later by approximately 2000 years than its pictorial narration on "the reverse of Louvre palette" and "the obverse of Battlefield palette". The presence of Thoth on Predynastic palettes is not a happenstance. Beyond doubt, the artist announced Thoth the discernor of souls; that is why the palettes have taken the form of heart and Thoth has been titled "Lord of Khnum".

Stela of Rudj'ahau, Eleventh Dynasty

He said: I was a wise man, a Thoth-like leader, who kept silence concerning the mysteries of the temple, who exalted the patricians over the plebs, a Thoth in judgment, to whom the Two Lands came. I was one like unto Ptah, the peer of Khnum. ⁽²⁸⁾ Here again, the discernor of souls has been denominated the peer of Khnum.

6.0 Deciphering the Nameplate

The relationship of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep that may be described by 'brothers', 'twins', 'conjoined twins' and 'lovers' are all, separately or combined, valid but not in the sensual apprehension of the scholars. The terms are authoritative in the spiritual perceptivity of all portraits of the twins. 'Ni' the manicurist has been inundated by the teachings of the Egyptian hierophant that have been pictorially narrated long time ago in the artefacts of Predynastic Egypt.



Fig. 8 Nameplate of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep
Copyright Egyptian Monuments, Su Bayfield

Being the manicurist of the king makes him especially sensitive and excessively spiritual by serving the "Lord of the Two Land" or literally "Lord of Soul of Egypt". ⁽²⁹⁾ Our manicurist, out of piousness, decided to show the two characteristics of his soul in the portraits of his tomb. By discerning the appellation of the soul as "Khnum", it is the moment of deciphering the "Nameplate" of the tomb (Fig. 8).

The left side of the nameplate reads "Ni-Ankh-Khnum" while the right side reads "Khnum-Hotep". 'Ni', the tomb owner used the appellation "Khnum" to denote his soul rather than the god Khnum. 'Ni' divided the "Khnum-soul" in two parts keeping the notion of twins in replication of the "conjoined-bull twins." Evidentially, the tomb belongs to a single man named 'Ni', while the iconography and the nameplate are relevant to his righteous soul in her twin-forces. At the request of Khnum-Hotep, the band of the Chamber Music played "The Two Divine Brothers.", and here, Reeder could not hold himself from defiling the spiritual ambience of the tomb. "The Two Divine Brothers" is the equivalent of *"The soul under the seal of God"*. ⁽³⁰⁾

6.1 Conjoined Twins

The Coffin of Paynedjem, Dynasty 21, Egyptian Museum (fig. 9) is a masterpiece in the pictorial narration of the conception of the soul where three essentialities are combined in a single icon.

1. Twin heads conjoined in a single body representing the twin-characteristics-soul.
2. The Twin heads are laid on a bar. This bar, or the "proprietary ground line" in other iconography, has been crucial in deciphering the painting on the outer coffin of Nesj-ta-udjat-akhet and Narmer palette in my research of 2014/2015.
3. The conjoined heads are flanked by two pots of flame denoting eternal life of the living soul.



Fig. 9 Coffin of Paynedjem inner
Egyptian Museum

6.2 The Two Divine Brothers: United in Life and Afterlife

The intersected feet of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep in Fig. 10 are an exemplar of the hieroglyph *sma*  'unite', meaning the twins are united. The motif of uniting of Horus and Seth is shown in fig. 11.



Fig. 10 Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep tomb,
offering hall west wall



Fig. 11 Horus and Seth are united

7.0 False Doors

Question: why the figure of the dead, single or couple, is portrayed twice on false doors? There must have been a conception behind the design of false doors. Ur-Ari-En-Ptah of Fig. 12 is depicted at the top, sitting on his own in front of an offering table, while the twin forces of his soul are individually depicted on the right and left walls of the false entry. It is the same for the couple Afa in Fig. 13. What happens if we take off the false entry from Fig. 12 and narrowed the two side walls to nil? We will see the twin-forces in the position of foot-to-foot, hand-to-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, face-to-face, and nose-to-nose, exactly as the portrait of the twin Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep (front cover). For the gesture of hands-on-shoulder, we borrow it from the false door of Katep fig. 14.



Fig. 12 false door of the interior of the Mastaba Tomb of Ur-Ari-En-Ptah

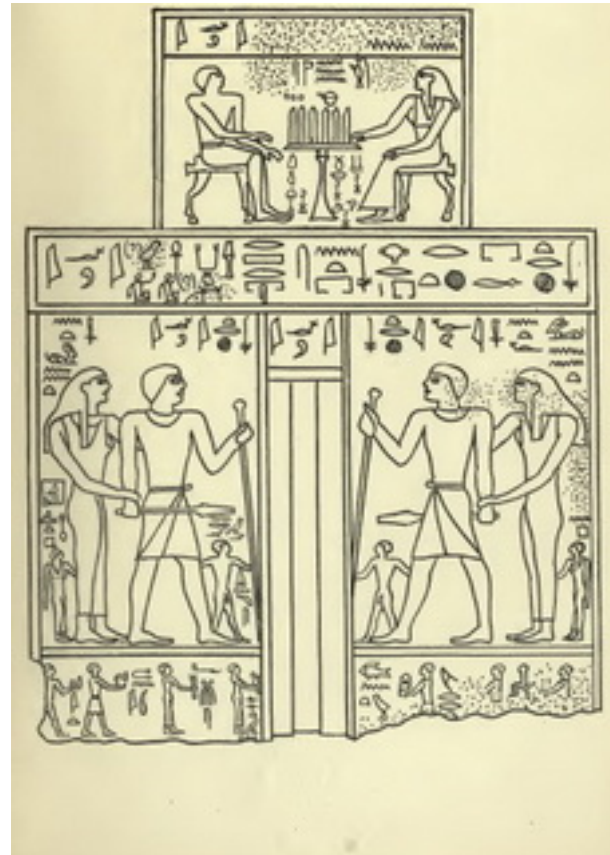


Fig. 13 White limestone stele, in the form of a false door of Afa

The description of the false door of Katep reads:
White lime stone false door of Katep, a priest of the cult of Khufu. The hieroglyphs, which are carved in detail, and the left-hand figure of the deceased, are in sunk relief. The right-hand figure and the signs forming the name " Katep," immediately above it, are in raised relief. ⁽³¹⁾

Here, we are witnessing how the ancient Egyptian expressed his genuine thoughts. If the "left-hand figure in sunk relief" and the " right-hand figure in raised relief" are folded together, they shall represent a single figure in a mold.

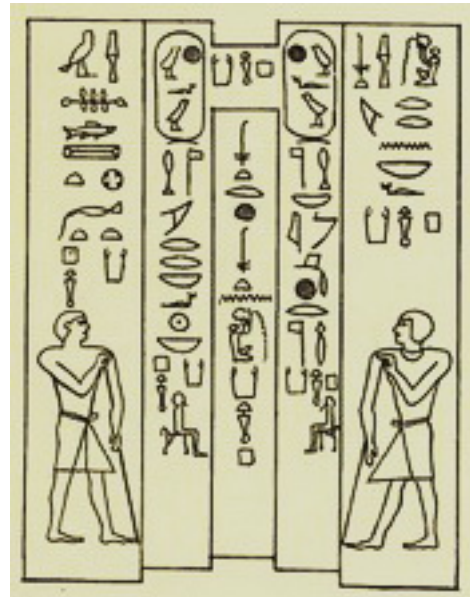


Fig. 14 false door of Katep

8.0 The Twin in Egyptian Texts

Pyramid texts Unis, utterance 148:

Ho, Unis! Your envoys have gone, your heralds have run, to your father, to Atum (to say for you): "Atum, bring me up to you, encircle me inside your arms. There is no star-god without his companion: I am your companion. See me, as you have seen the forms of the progeny who know their spells, the Imperishable Stars, and see (in me) the two in the palace—that is, Horus and Seth." ⁽³²⁾

Pyramid Texts Teti Utterance 18:

May you wake in peace, Sees Behind Him, in peace. May you wake in peace, Nut's oarsman, ferryman of the Winding Canal. Tell the name of Teti to the Sun, announce Teti to the Sun, for Teti is off to that far palace of the lords of kas in which the Sun dawns from the Horus Mounds and the Seth Mounds, the god of those who go to their kas. ⁽³³⁾

CT Spell 16 and 17:

Be seated, O N, in the presence of Geb, chiefest of the gods, for you are Horus with his White Crown on his head. Isis bore him, Khabet brought him up, the nurse of Horus nursed him, the powers of Seth served him over and above his own powers, his father Osiris gave him these two staffs of his. ⁽³⁴⁾

CT Spell 318:

I the unique one came and joined the Two Brothers. While the head of Horus remained with that of Seth and *vice versa*. It was I who inundated the Eye of Horus with the Nile. ⁽³⁵⁾
 Amazingly, the spell is an attestation for the portraits of 'Ni' the manicurist and Fig. 9 and Fig. 10.

Conclusion

This paper is a proof that my statement that reads: "Dynastic writings are of no wield in contemplating the context of the palettes and by contrast, it is in vain to veraciously interpret the dynastic iconography and writings secluded from the pictorial narrations of Predynastic artefacts," is well-grounded. The iconography of the tomb has been sensually treated in Egyptology. The palettes of Predynastic Egypt have been treated in the same manner where scholars could not see other than animals, hunting, and battlefield scenes. The palettes of Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt remained speechless for over a century till it's deciphering in my research of 2014/2015. The spiritual narrations of the tomb could not have been revealed in the absence of my earlier research. It is evidential that the tomb belongs to a single man named Ni, who portrayed his soul in her twin-forces. The nameplate Ni-Ankh-Khnum and Khnum-Hotep now reads: Ni-(Ankh-Khnum)-(Khnum-Hotep), where there is no place for the conjugation 'and'. The nameplate actually reads:

Life belongs to Ni' Soul - Ni' Soul is Satisfied

Notes

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